

**STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg No.: 2012-58738
Issue No.: 2009
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: September 27, 2012
Oakland County DHS (02)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Colleen M. Mamelka

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon the Claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was conducted from Detroit, Michigan on Thursday, September 17, 2012. The Claimant appeared and testified. Participating on behalf of the Department of Human Services ("Department") was [REDACTED].

During the hearing, the Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision, in order to allow for the submission of additional medical evidence. The records were received, reviewed, and forwarded to the State Hearing Review Team ("SHRT") for consideration. On December 7, 2012, this office received the SHRT determination which found the Claimant not disabled. This matter is now before the undersigned for a final decision.

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined that the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance ("MA-P") benefit program?

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. The Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking MA-P benefits on May 9, 2012.
2. On May 24, 2012, the Medical Review Team ("MRT") found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 1, pp. 7, 8)

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3. On May 29, 2012, the Department notified the Claimant of the MRT determination. (Exhibit 1, pp. 5, 6)
4. On June 7, 2012, the Department received the Claimant's written request for hearing.
5. On July 26th and December 11, 2012, the SHRT found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 3)
6. The Claimant alleged physical disabling impairments due to a throat mass, Sjögren syndrome, joint pain, an abdominal pain.
7. The Claimant alleged mental disabling impairments due to anxiety and depression.
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 35 years old with a [REDACTED] birth date; was 5'2" in height; and weighed 120 pounds.
9. The Claimant has a Master's Degree with vocational training and an employment history as a senior technical recoupment specialist, a recruiter, and as an intern.
10. The Claimant's impairments have lasted, or are expected to last, continuously for a period of 12 months or longer.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance program is established by Subchapter XIX of Chapter 7 of The Public Health & Welfare Act, 42 USC 1397, and is administered by the Department of Human Services, formerly known as the Family Independence Agency, pursuant to MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual ("BAM"), the Bridges Eligibility Manual ("BEM"), and the Bridges Reference Tables ("RFT").

Disability is defined as the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months. 20 CFR 416.905(a). The person claiming a physical or mental disability has the burden to establish it through the use of competent medical evidence from qualified medical sources such as his or her medical history, clinical/laboratory findings, diagnosis/prescribed treatment, prognosis for recovery and/or medical assessment of ability to do work-related activities or ability to reason and make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is alleged. 20 CFR 416.913. An individual's subjective pain complaints are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to

establish disability. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.929(a). Similarly, conclusory statements by a physician or mental health professional that an individual is disabled or blind, absent supporting medical evidence, is insufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.927.

When determining disability, the federal regulations require several factors to be considered including: (1) the location/duration/frequency/intensity of an applicant's pain; (2) the type/dosage/effectiveness/side effects of any medication the applicant takes to relieve pain; (3) any treatment other than pain medication that the applicant has received to relieve pain; and (4) the effect of the applicant's pain on his or her ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(3). The applicant's pain must be assessed to determine the extent of his or her functional limitation(s) in light of the objective medical evidence presented. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(2).

In order to determine whether or not an individual is disabled, federal regulations require a five-step sequential evaluation process be utilized. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(1). The five-step analysis requires the trier of fact to consider an individual's current work activity; the severity of the impairment(s) both in duration and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1; residual functional capacity to determine whether an individual can perform past relevant work; and residual functional capacity along with vocational factors (i.e. age, education, and work experience) to determine if an individual can adjust to other work. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945.

If an individual is found disabled, or not disabled, at any step, a determination or decision is made with no need evaluate subsequent steps. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). If a determination cannot be made that an individual is disabled, or not disabled, at a particular step, the next step is required. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). If an impairment does not meet or equal a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed before moving from step three to step four. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945. Residual functional capacity is the most an individual can do despite the limitations based on all relevant evidence. 20 CFR 416.945(a)(1). An individual's residual functional capacity assessment is evaluated at both steps four and five. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). In determining disability, an individual's functional capacity to perform basic work activities is evaluated and if found that the individual has the ability to perform basic work activities without significant limitation, disability will not be found. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv). In general, the individual has the responsibility to prove disability. 20 CFR 416.912(a). An impairment or combination of impairments is not severe if it does not significantly limit an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.921(a). The individual has the responsibility to provide evidence of prior work experience; efforts to work; and any other factor showing how the impairment affects the ability to work. 20 CFR 416.912(c)(3)(5)(6).

In addition to the above, when evaluating mental impairments, a special technique is utilized. 20 CFR 416.920a(a). First, an individual's pertinent symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings are evaluated to determine whether a medically determinable mental impairment exists. 20 CFR 416.920a(b)(1). When a medically determinable mental impairment is established, the symptoms, signs and laboratory findings that substantiate the impairment are documented to include the individual's significant history, laboratory findings, and functional limitations. 20 CFR 416.920a(e)(2). Functional limitation(s) is assessed based upon the extent to which the impairment(s) interferes with an individual's ability to function independently, appropriately, effectively, and on a sustained basis. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(2). Chronic mental disorders, structured settings, medication, and other treatment and the effect on the overall degree of functionality is considered. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(1). In addition, four broad functional areas (activities of daily living; social functioning; concentration, persistence or pace; and episodes of decompensation) are considered when determining an individual's degree of functional limitation. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(3). The degree of limitation for the first three functional areas is rated by a five point scale: none, mild, moderate, marked, and extreme. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(4). A four point scale (none, one or two, three, four or more) is used to rate the degree of limitation in the fourth functional area. *Id.* The last point on each scale represents a degree of limitation that is incompatible with the ability to do any gainful activity. *Id.*

After the degree of functional limitation is determined, the severity of the mental impairment is determined. 20 CFR 416.920a(d). If severe, a determination of whether the impairment meets or is the equivalent of a listed mental disorder is made. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(2). If the severe mental impairment does not meet (or equal) a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(3).

As outlined above, the first step looks at the individual's current work activity. In the record presented, the Claimant is not involved in substantial gainful activity therefore is not ineligible for disability benefits under Step 1.

The severity of the Claimant's alleged impairment(s) is considered under Step 2. The Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairments. In order to be considered disabled for MA purposes, the impairment must be severe. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 416.920(b). An impairment, or combination of impairments, is severe if it significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities regardless of age, education and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 416.920(c). Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. 20 CFR 416.921(b). Examples include:

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1. Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling;
2. Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;
3. Understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions;
4. Use of judgment;
5. Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and
6. Dealing with changes in a routine work setting.

Id.

The second step allows for dismissal of a disability claim obviously lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v Bowen*, 880 F2d 860, 862 (CA 6, 1988). The severity requirement may still be employed as an administrative convenience to screen out claims that are totally groundless solely from a medical standpoint. *Id.* at 863 citing *Farris v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 773 F2d 85, 90 n.1 (CA 6, 1985). An impairment qualifies as non-severe only if, regardless of a claimant's age, education, or work experience, the impairment would not affect the claimant's ability to work. *Salmi v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 774 F2d 685, 692 (CA 6, 1985).

In the present case, the Claimant alleges disability due to throat mass, Sjögren syndrome, joint pain, an abdominal pain.

In support of her claim, some older records from as early as 2008 were submitted which confirm diagnoses of mild right forearm tenderness, muscle strain, abnormal pharynx, back pain, Sjögren syndrome, headaches, cervical and thoracic pain, acute sinusitis, and anxiety.

On January 7, 2011, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment where she was treated/diagnosed with gastritis, constipation, and GERD.

On May 19, 2011, a pulmonary function test was normal.

On May 26, 2011, the Claimant was treated/diagnosed with acute sinusitis with tenderness and mucus drainage.

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On June 20, 2011, the Claimant sought treatment via the emergency room with complaints of ongoing cough. Chest x-rays were normal. The Claimant was treated and discharged with the diagnoses of reactive airway disease, shortness of breath, and cough.

On December 5, 2011, the Claimant was treated/diagnosed with acute purulent rhinitis and abnormal pharynx.

On April 26, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment. The diagnoses were sinusitis, TMJ disorder, and dysuria.

On April 28, 2012 the Claimant was treated at the emergency room with complaints of lower abdominal cramping, diarrhea, and syncopal episode. The Claimant was stabilized and discharged the following day with the diagnoses of abdominal pain, diarrhea, and syncope.

On May 1, 2012, the Claimant attended an appointment following an emergency room visit for passing out. Review of the CT scan revealed a nodule on the thyroid.

On May 4, 2012, an ultrasound identified a complex cystic mass involving the left lobe of the thyroid gland. A biopsy was recommended to determine possible malignancy.

On June 19, 2012, the Claimant attended an appointment regarding her thyroid nodule. The nodule had increased in size noting the chance for carcinoma was between 10 and 20 percent.

On June 25, 2012, the Claimant attended an appointment regarding her rhinitis symptoms, nasal drainage/congestion, sinus pressure, headache, voice changes, and sore throats. The diagnoses were history of chronic cough, possible asthma, suspected GERD, chronic sinusitis, and perennial allergic and vasomotor rhinitis.

On June 27, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment where she was treated/diagnosed with chest palpitations and urinary tract infection.

On September 27, 2012, a pulmonary function test ("PFT") revealed a Forced Expiratory Volume at 1 second ("FEV₁") of 2.64, 2.86, and 2.82 before bronchodilator and a Forced Vital Capacity ("FVC") of 3.85, 3.75, and 3.91. After the bronchodilator the FEV₁ was 2.68 and the FVC was 3.11. The test results were normal.

On October 2, 2012, a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnoses were complex cystic thyroid mass, enlargement and choking sensation, Sjögren syndrome, joint pain, joint swelling, chest pain, chest palpitation, depression, and anxiety. The physical examination documented choking

sensation and coughing, chest palpitations, metacarpophalangeal (“MCP”) and distal interphalangeal (“DIP”) joint tenderness and swelling bilaterally, shoulder pain, wrist pain, and bilateral ankle pain. Depressed mood, anxiety, and insomnia were also noted. The Claimant’s condition was deteriorating.

On October 2, 2012, an annual physical examination was performed. The diagnoses complex cystic thyroid mass, enlargement and choking sensation, Sjögren syndrome, joint pain, joint swelling, chest pain, chest palpitation, depression, and anxiety. Suicidal and homicidal ideations were noted.

As previously noted, the Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairment(s). As summarized above, the Claimant has presented medical evidence establishing that she does have some physical and mental limitations on her ability to perform basic work activities. The degree of functional limitation on the Claimant’s activities, social function, concentration, persistence, or pace is mild. The degree of functional limitation in the fourth area (episodes of decompensation) is at most a 1. The medical evidence has established that the Claimant has an impairment, or combination thereof, that has more than a *de minimis* effect on the Claimant’s basic work activities. Further, the impairments have lasted continuously for twelve months; therefore, the Claimant is not disqualified from receipt of MA-P benefits under Step 2.

In the third step of the sequential analysis of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the Claimant’s impairment, or combination of impairments, is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. The evidence confirms treatment/diagnoses of gastritis, GERD, sinusitis, rhinitis, abnormal pharynx, TMJ disorder, chest palpitations, joint tenderness/swelling, anxiety, depression, wrist pain, shoulder pain, bilateral ankle pain, Sjögren syndrome, and complex cystic thyroid mass.

Listing 1.00 (musculoskeletal system), Listing 2.00 (special senses and speech), Listing 3.00 (respiratory system), Listing 12.00 (mental disorders), and Listing 14.00 (auto immune disorders), were considered in light of the objective evidence. There was no evidence of nerve root impingement, fracture, or major joint dysfunction which seriously impacts the Claimant’s ability to ambulate effectively or perform fine or gross motor movements. There was no evidence of loss of vision, hearing, or speech. The Claimant’s PFTs were normal and there were no objective findings to meet the intent and severity requirement of a respiratory impairment. Mentally, the evidence does not document any marked limitations. Regarding the Claimant’s Sjögren syndrome, the evidence does not show involvement of two or more organs/body systems or repeated manifestation of Sjögren syndrome with marked limitations of activities of daily living, social functioning, or with the ability to complete tasks in a timely manner due to deficiencies in concentration, persistence, or pace.

Listing 13.00 discusses malignant neoplastic disease. Specifically, Listing 13.09 discusses thyroid tumors. To meet this listing, the evidence must show that the tumor is

- A. Anaplastic (undifferentiated) carcinoma, or
- B. Carcinoma with metastases beyond the regional lymph nodes progressive despite radioactive iodine therapy, or
- C. Medullary carcinoma with metastases beyond the regional lymph nodes

In this case, the evidence confirms a complex cystic mass. There is no evidence of carcinoma. As such, the objective findings do not meet the intent and severity requirement of Listing 13.09.

Ultimately, although the objective medical records establish some physical and mental impairments, these records do not meet the intent and severity requirements of a listing, or its equivalent. Accordingly, the Claimant can not be found disabled, or not disabled at Step 3; therefore, the Claimant's eligibility is considered under Step 4. 20 CFR 416.905(a).

Before considering the fourth step in the sequential analysis, a determination of the individual's residual functional capacity ("RFC") is made. 20 CFR 416.945. An individual's RFC is the most he/she can still do on a sustained basis despite the limitations from the impairment(s). *Id.* The total limiting effects of all the impairments, to include those that are not severe, are considered. 20 CFR 416.945(e).

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, jobs are classified as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy. 20 CFR 416.967. Sedentary work involves lifting of no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. 20 CFR 416.967(a). Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. *Id.* Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing up to 10 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(b). Even though weight lifted may be very little, a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls. *Id.* To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, an individual must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. *Id.* An individual capable of light work is also capable of sedentary work, unless there are additionally limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. *Id.* Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(c). An individual capable of performing medium work is

also capable of light and sedentary work. *Id.* Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(d). An individual capable of heavy work is also capable of medium, light, and sedentary work. *Id.* Finally, very heavy work involves lifting objects weighing more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing 50 pounds or more. 20 CFR 416.967(e). An individual capable of very heavy work is able to perform work under all categories. *Id.*

Limitations or restrictions which affect the ability to meet the demands of jobs other than strength demands (exertional requirements, i.e. sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, or pulling) are considered nonexertional. 20 CFR 416.969a(a). In considering whether an individual can perform past relevant work, a comparison of the individual's residual functional capacity with the demands of past relevant work. *Id.* If an individual can no longer do past relevant work the same residual functional capacity assessment along with an individual's age, education, and work experience is considered to determine whether an individual can adjust to other work which exists in the national economy. *Id.* Examples of non-exertional limitations or restrictions include difficulty to function due to nervousness, anxiousness, or depression; difficulty maintaining attention or concentration; difficulty understanding or remembering detailed instructions; difficulty in seeing or hearing; difficulty tolerating some physical feature(s) of certain work settings (i.e. can't tolerate dust or fumes); or difficulty performing the manipulative or postural functions of some work such as reaching, handling, stooping, climbing, crawling, or crouching. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(1)(i) – (vi). If the impairment(s) and related symptoms, such as pain, only affect the ability to perform the non-exertional aspects of work-related activities, the rules in Appendix 2 do not direct factual conclusions of disabled or not disabled. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(2). The determination of whether disability exists is based upon the principles in the appropriate sections of the regulations, giving consideration to the rules for specific case situations in Appendix 2. *Id.*

In this case, the evidence confirms treatment/diagnoses of gastritis, GERD, sinusitis, rhinitis, abnormal pharynx, TMJ disorder, chest palpitations, joint tenderness/swelling, anxiety, depression, wrist pain, shoulder pain, bilateral ankle pain, Sjögren syndrome, and complex cystic thyroid mass. The Claimant testified that she is able to perform physical activities provided it's not strenuous, noting she tires quickly. The objective medical evidence does not contain any physical or mental limitations. After review of the entire record and considering the Claimant's testimony, it is found, at this point, that the Claimant maintains the residual functional capacity to perform at least light work as defined by 20 CFR 416.967(b). Limitations being the alternation between sitting and standing at will.

The fourth step in analyzing a disability claim requires an assessment of the Claimant's residual functional capacity ("RFC") and past relevant employment. 20 CFR

416.920(a)(4)(iv). An individual is not disabled if he/she can perform past relevant work. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3). Past relevant work is work that has been performed within the past 15 years that was a substantial gainful activity and that lasted long enough for the individual to learn the position. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(1). Vocational factors of age, education, and work experience, and whether the past relevant employment exists in significant numbers in the national economy is not considered. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3).

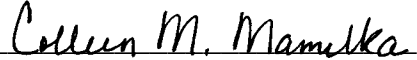
The Claimant's prior employment was that of a senior technical recoupment specialist, a recruiter, and as an intern. In consideration of the Claimant's testimony and Occupational Code, the prior employment is classified as semi-skilled, sedentary work. If the impairment or combination of impairments does not limit physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, it is not a severe impairment(s) and disability does not exist. 20 CFR 416.920. As noted above, the objective evidence does not contain any physical or mental restrictions that would preclude employment. The Claimant testified that she was capable of performing past relevant work. In light of the entire record and the Claimant's RFC (see above), it is found that the Claimant is able to perform past relevant work. Accordingly, the Claimant is found not disabled at Step 4 with no further analysis required.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the above findings of fact and conclusions of law finds the Claimant not disabled for purposes of the MA-P benefit program.

Accordingly, it is ORDERED:

The Department's determination is AFFIRMED.



Colleen M. Mamelka
Administrative Law Judge
For Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: March 6, 2013

Date Mailed: March 6, 2013

NOTICE: Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) may order a rehearing or reconsideration on either its own motion or at the request of a party within 30 days of the mailing date of this Decision and Order. MAHS will not order a rehearing or reconsideration on the Department's motion where the final decision cannot be implemented within 90 days of the filing of the original request. (60 days for FAP cases)

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The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court within 30 days of the receipt of the Decision and Order or, if a timely request for rehearing was made, within 30 days of the receipt date of the rehearing decision.

Claimant may request a rehearing or reconsideration for the following reasons:

- A rehearing **MAY** be granted if there is newly discovered evidence that could affect the outcome of the original hearing decision.
- A reconsideration **MAY** be granted for any of the following reasons:
 - misapplication of manual policy or law in the hearing decision,
 - typographical errors, mathematical error, or other obvious errors in the hearing decision that effect the substantial rights of the claimant:
 - the failure of the ALJ to address other relevant issues in the hearing decision.

Request must be submitted through the local DHS office or directly to MAHS by mail at
Michigan Administrative Hearings
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P. O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-07322

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cc:

